

Senator

Luke Esser

Senate Minority Floor Leader



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Senate leadership:
Minority Floor Leader

Senate committees:
Judiciary
Transportation
Rules

**Town Hall Meeting On
Medicare's Prescription Drug
Program December 15th!
See Details on Back Page!**

See details on back page!

Nov./Dec. 2005

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope that 2005 has offered many productive and positive experiences for you and your family. As the year winds down, I wanted to give you a final report on what happened in the Legislature. I wish I had more good news to report.

TAXES I was very disappointed that the Legislature raised taxes by a half-billion dollars, gutted the spending limits approved by the voters in Initiative 601 and failed to fund many important obligations of state government.

ELECTION REFORM Given the number of errors that occurred in the 2004 elections, there couldn't have been a stronger case made for genuine election reform. Some progress was made, but common sense solutions like requiring voters to present photo ID at the polls were rejected by the majority.

TRANSPORTATION Now that the voters have spoken on Initiative 912, it's time for regional leaders to come forward with a plan to complete important highway improvement projects – and not simply start them. My highest transportation priority is completing a comprehensive \$3.2 billion improvement plan for I-405 that will increase capacity for both highway users and transit users.

EDUCATION Most local residents consider our public schools to be one of the strengths of our community. I'm pleased that progress was made in funding schools, but the unfortunate reality is that we could have provided the same level of funding for education without raising taxes.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you ever have any questions or comments about your state government. Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter, and I hope that you will have many opportunities to enjoy the approaching holiday season with family and close friends.

Sincerely,

Sen. Luke Esser

Promoting Open & Accountable Government

A court case in 2004 seriously undercut a citizen's initiative passed in the 1970's that requires government agencies to provide copies of public documents to citizens and the media. I was proud to co-sponsor legislation that prohibits government agencies from denying public records requests simply because the request is overly broad. By strengthening the Open Public Records Act, we made sure that government remains open and accessible to the people.

Legislation regarding performance audits was adopted by the Legislature this year, but I could not support that legislation after an amendment giving the independently-elected State Auditor the authority to choose which state agencies would be audited was rejected. The performance audit initiative which the voters passed in November (I-900) was much stronger than the bill passed by the Legislature.

I believe that performance audits can help us to be more efficient with the tax dollars we already collect and also provide us with the opportunity to reallocate the savings to our highest-priority programs.

Majority Passes Half-Billion Dollar Tax Increase & Unsustainable Budget

I believe it was a terrible mistake for the majority in Olympia to increase taxes for our operating budget by a half-billion dollars. Two years ago we passed an historic “no new taxes” budget on a bipartisan basis and we should have done so again this year.

Sadly, no tax increase was needed. Because of recent economic growth, the state will be collecting \$1.5 billion more from existing taxes over the next two years than in the previous two years. Important state responsibilities could have been fully funded through that revenue growth without a tax increase.

Worse yet, the budget that the majority adopted spends \$600 million more over the next two years than the state will collect in revenues – even with the half-billion dollars in new taxes.

Because they were unnecessary, and because I believe they will put a damper on our economic growth, I voted against the reinstatement of the death tax (also known as the estate tax) and the other tax increases imposed by the majority.

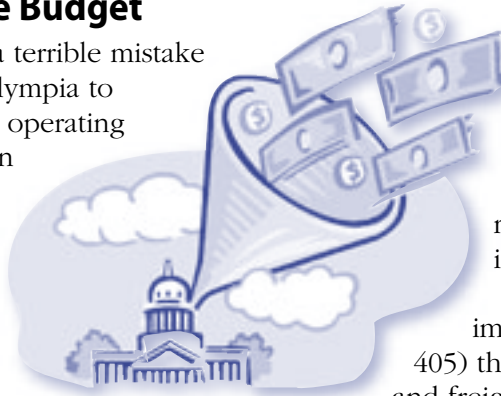
Reducing Congestion for All

Now that the voters have spoken on I-912, it's time for regional leaders to move forward and come up with the plans and resources needed to finish important highway improvement projects, and not be content with simply starting them

(personally, I voted against the gas tax increase for reasons that included my concern about the lack of a plan to finish important projects).

Some officials in Olympia have a vision of reducing traffic congestion by implementing tolls that are high enough to force low- and middle-income drivers off the highways. I disagree. I believe we need transportation improvements that reduce congestion for all, regardless of income level.

There are many needed highway improvement projects (most notably on I-405) that would benefit commuters, bus users and freight movers. We should move beyond the “highways vs. transit” deadlock of the past and build projects that will increase capacity for both highway users and transit users.



Improving Our Environment

In 2004 the citizens passed an initiative (I-297) to limit the importation of radioactive waste into Hanford. Shortly after I-297 passed with the largest number of “yes” votes for an initiative in state history, a lawsuit was filed to invalidate the initiative.

Working with those who drafted I-297, I co-sponsored legislation which would make technical changes to the initiative to make it likelier to withstand the court challenge. This legislation passed the Senate, but not the House of Representatives.

In other environmental legislation, new tax incentives were adopted to encourage the production of solar energy panels in Washington, and improved auto emission standards for new cars were adopted as well. An Oil Spill Advisory Council was also created to provide citizen advice on how to prevent oil spills in Puget Sound.

In the future, I hope the Legislature will do even more to encourage the adoption of cutting-edge technologies by private businesses and individuals that will lead to the more efficient use of energy and reduce pollution.





Excellence in our Public Schools

We have strong schools in our part of the state, but today's students and future generations deserve even better.

I supported a comprehensive education funding study that will hopefully provide us with a baseline of information that decision-makers can use to make certain that public schools are being funded adequately and appropriately.

In particular, the Legislature needs to do a better job of reimbursing local school districts for the rising costs of special education and student transportation.

I remain committed to the annual testing of students and to the retention of high standards that will prepare students for success in college, careers, and life.

At the same time, we must make sure that additional resources are available to provide extra instruction after school and during the summer for those struggling to pass the WASL and graduate from high school.

Because we have a statewide salary scale, teachers in rural areas (where the cost of living is lower) have a higher standard of living than teachers in areas like ours, with a higher cost of living. I strongly support legislation that would allow local school districts in high cost-of-living areas to present a levy to the voters that would provide funding to help equalize teacher salaries.

Protecting Public Safety

I was very pleased that we were able to enhance the penalties for certain crimes in this state and make other changes in state law to enhance public safety.

✓ **Regulating the sale of certain drugs used to make methamphetamines (ESHB**



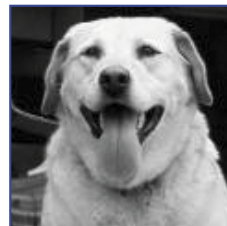
2266): This measure requires products (such as certain cold medicines) containing ephedrine or pseudoephedrine to be kept in a central location accessible only to store employees. Unfortunately, these drugs can be used to

manufacture methamphetamines. Purchasers must show picture ID and must be at least age 18.

✓ **Establishing penalties for failing to secure a vehicle load when an individual is injured (SHB 1478):**

I prime-sponsored SB 5457, which was the Senate companion bill to SHB 1478. I sponsored the measure in response to the accident and long ordeal suffered by Renton resident Maria Federici. Maria was struck by particleboard that fell from a truck in front of her while she drove on I-405 in 2004 and nearly died from the injuries. Her courage in overcoming these injuries was a tremendous inspiration to all of us who worked on the legislation.

✓ **Increasing penalties for animal cruelty and animal fighting (SHB 1304):**



This year I also introduced SB 5352, a similar bill to SHB 1304. Under SHB 1304, a person is guilty of first-degree animal cruelty (which is a class C felony) when he or she starves, dehydrates or suffocates an animal with criminal negligence and the animal suffers unnecessary or unjustifiable physical pain or death.

More Progress Needed on Election Reform

I am still shaking my head at the refusal of the majority in Olympia to implement some common sense reforms in response to the fiascos that occurred in King County's Elections Department last year. Not enough has been done to make sure that dead people aren't voting, that non-citizens aren't voting and that no one is allowed to vote twice.

Despite the efforts of many of us in the Legislature, we still don't have a requirement for voters to present



photo ID at the polls to prove they are who they claim to be. You may have to show photo ID to rent a video at the local store, but you don't need to show any in order to vote.

In fairness, some improvements were made. For instance, the process whereby election officials can mark up a ballot after Election Day based on their determination of "voter intent" was eliminated. However, much more progress needs to be accomplished.

TOWN HALL MEETING ON MEDICARE'S NEW PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT

Beginning January 1st, a new federal prescription drug program will take effect and it could save you money. Because many seniors have found the new Medicare prescription drug program to be confusing, I want the residents of the 48th Legislative District to receive as much information as possible about the coming changes

that could possibly reduce the cost of prescription drugs. On January 1st, 2006, Medicare will begin offering



insurance coverage for prescription drugs through voluntary Medicare prescription drug plans. Enrollment in this program began November 15th.

To help you better understand these changes, I've arranged a Town Hall meeting and invited representatives of federal agencies responsible for the new program to help answer your questions. I look forward to seeing you there.

WHAT:

- Medicare Prescription Drug Program Town Hall meeting
- U.S. Department of Health informational presentation

WHEN:

- Thursday, December 15th
- 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

LOOK

WHERE:

- Bellevue Family YMCA
14230 Bel-Red Road
Bellevue, WA 98007

WHO:

- Luke Esser, 48th District Senator
- James Whitfield, Regional Director for the US Department of Health & Human Services

What's on Your Mind?

The session update I mailed out earlier this year included an issue survey, the results of which are now available on my Web site, <http://www1.leg.wa.gov/senate/esser>. Thanks to those of you who shared your views on the issues.

I would appreciate hearing from you about which issues you think the Legislature should address in 2006. I've suggested a few, but feel free to write in any issues that aren't listed. I look forward to reading your responses.

Which issues should the Legislature focus on in 2006? (Please rank, with 1 being the most important)

- ☐ Economy and taxation
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Higher Education
- ☐ Public safety/Law enforcement
- ☐ Government growth
- ☐ Environmental issues
- ☐ Land use and management
- ☐ Health care
- ☐ Human services
- ☐ Election Reform

Other: _____

Again, thank you for sharing your opinions and comments with me about these very important issues. Please clip this survey and mail it back to my office in Olympia at 416 Legislative Building, P.O. Box 40448, Olympia, WA 98504-0448, or e-mail the same information to me at Esser.Luke@leg.wa.gov.



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2005 LEGISLATIVE REPORT & TOWN HALL MEETING

